

AMENDMENT

1.-48. (canceled)

49. (currently amended) A storage system for a vehicle having a driver compartment and a cargo area disposed to the rear of the driver compartment within a contiguous enclosure, wherein the enclosure is defined by a floor, a roof, two opposing side walls which each connect the roof to the floor, and exterior side panels, wherein the cargo area includes opposing rear wheel wells extending into the cargo area from the bottom edges of the side panels,

the storage system comprising

at least one storage area adjacent to and separated from the cargo area, the storage area being defined by at least a portion of an outwardly bowed exterior side panel, an inner panel, a top and bottom which connect the inner panel to the exterior side panel, and wherein the storage area extends into the cargo area no further than the wheel well extends into the cargo area,

wherein at least one section of ~~at least one of~~ the outwardly bowed exterior side panels is hinged to provide access to the storage area therein.

50. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein at least one storage area extends over at least one rear wheel well.

51. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein at least one storage area extends forward and rearward from at least one wheel well.

52. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein at least one storage area is constructed to extend along a substantial portion of the side panel.

53. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein the storage area is enclosed and the enclosed storage area includes a plurality of cooperating latch members mounted on the storage area and the at least one hinged section of the at least one side panel.

54. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49, further comprising at least one mechanism for retaining the at least one hinged section closed.

55. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein each side of the vehicle is provided with at least one storage area and at least one hinged section.

56. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49, additionally including at least one strut assembly operatively connected to retain the at least one hinged section of the side panel in an opened position.

57. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 56, wherein the at least one strut assembly provides a temperature control during use, the control being insulation, heating, or insulation and heating.

58. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein at least one of the side panels includes more than one hinged section that is capable of being opened to expose the storage area.

59. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49, additionally including at least one drain/air relief valve assembly mounted in the at least one storage area.

60. (currently amended) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein the at least one storage area includes at least one of an adjustable shelf, a slideable shelf, a movable shelf, ~~or~~ and a drawer.

61. (previously presented) A vehicle having a forward compartment for carrying a driver, and including at least one forward side door providing access to the forward compartment, and an enclosure for passengers, merchandise or equipment wherein the enclosure is disposed to the rear of the driver compartment, and further wherein the enclosure is bounded by exterior, contoured side panels and a rear, including at least one rear door, and optionally at least one rear

side door, and wherein each side panel has a lower perimeter that includes a curve to accommodate a wheel well adjacent each side panel;

the vehicle comprising at least one storage area disposed between a rear-most one of said side doors and the rear of the vehicle, and adjacent at least one exterior, contoured side panel and extending into the enclosure of the vehicle no further than the wheel well extends into the enclosure, and wherein the side panel adjacent the storage area includes a hinged section effective to provide an opening from the exterior of the vehicle into the storage area, and further wherein the separation width and cross sectional contour of the side panels of the enclosure is substantially the same as the separation width and cross-sectional contour of the forward compartment where it adjoins the side panels of the enclosure.

62. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 61, wherein the storage system is located intermediate the driver compartment and the rear door.

63. (canceled)

64. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 61, wherein the storage system is mounted in the side panel of the enclosure on the driver's side of the vehicle.

65. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 61, wherein there is a storage system mounted in the side panels of the enclosure on both sides of the vehicle.

66. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 61, additionally including at least two hinged sections on at least one side of the enclosure, the hinged sections enabling access to at least a portion of the interior of the storage area.

67. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 61, wherein a storage area is located one of forward or rearward of the wheel well.

68. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 61, wherein a storage area is located over the wheel well.

69. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 68, wherein the hinged section is located entirely above the wheel well.

70. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 68, wherein the hinged section is located over the wheel well.

71. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 68, wherein the hinged section is located forward and rearward of the wheel well.

72. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 66, wherein at least one of the hinged sections is hinged horizontally.

73. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 61, additionally including at least one strut assembly operatively connected to retain the hinged section in an opened position.

74. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 73, wherein the at least one strut assembly provides a temperature control during use, the control being insulation, heating, or heating and insulation.

75.-84. (canceled)

85. (currently amended) A vehicle comprising a driver's compartment and a rear compartment contained within the same enclosure, the rear compartment including a storage system, the rear compartment comprising:

a floor area bounded on either side by side panels with exterior surfaces defining the width of the rear compartment, two opposed wheel wells, one at each side of the floor panel, and wherein the side panels of the rear compartment are substantially aligned with the driver's compartment,

at least one hinged section in the exterior surface of at least one of the side panels,

at least one storage area located adjacent the at least one hinged section, and extending into a cargo area of the vehicle to an inner wall of the storage area, wherein the hinged section is configured to provide access to the storage area when the hinged section is in the open position and wherein the width of the storage area is not greater than the width of the wheel well;

a latch for retaining the at least one hinged ~~contoured~~ side panel section in the closed position; and

a strut for retaining the hinged section in the open position.

86. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 85, wherein the at least one hinged section is hinged one of horizontally and vertically.

87. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 85, wherein a temperature control for the strut is provided by at least one of insulating, heating, or heating and insulating.

88. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 85, additionally including at least one drain/air relief valve assembly mounted in the at least one storage area.

89. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 85, wherein the vehicle includes at least one hinged section in each of the side panels and at least one storage area located adjacent the hinged sections.

90. (canceled)

91. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 85, wherein the rear compartment comprises a passenger compartment.

92. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 85, wherein the rear compartment comprises a cargo area.

93. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein the exterior surfaces of the side panels enclosing the cargo area are substantially aligned with the exterior surfaces of the driver's compartment.

94. (previously presented) A vehicle comprising a driver's compartment and a rear compartment, the rear compartment including a storage system, the rear compartment comprising:

a floor area with opposing edges, a roof with opposing edges, and bounded on either side by side panels extending from the opposing edges of the floor panel to the opposing edges of the roof, and being outwardly bowed, defining the width of the rear compartment and at least one hinged section in the exterior surface of at least one of the side panels,

at least one storage area located intermediate the side panels, adjacent the at least one hinged section, and extending into a cargo area of the vehicle, wherein the hinged section is configured to provide access to the storage area when the hinged section is in the open position; and

a strut for retaining the hinged section in the open position, wherein a temperature control for the strut is provided by at least one of insulating, heating, or heating and insulating.

95. (canceled)

96. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 94, wherein the rear compartment comprises a passenger compartment.

97. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 94, wherein the rear compartment comprises a cargo area.

98. (currently amended) The storage system of Claim 49 wherein one section of ~~at least one of~~ the outwardly bowed side panels is hinged to open outwardly to the exterior of the vehicle.

99. (currently amended) The storage system of Claim 49 wherein more than one section of ~~at least one of~~ the outwardly bowed side panels is hinged to open outwardly to the exterior of the vehicle.

100. (canceled)

101. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49 wherein the vehicle having a cargo area is a van.

102-104. (canceled)

105. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 50 wherein the width of the storage area is approximately the same as the width of the wheel well.

106. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49 wherein a portion of the sidewall of the cargo area is the opposing side of the inner panel of the storage area.

107. (canceled)

108. (previously presented) The storage system of Claim 49 wherein the storage system is fabricated on an assembly line.

109. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 61 wherein the storage area is inaccessible from the enclosure.

110. (canceled)

111. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 61 wherein the vehicle is a van.

112. (canceled)

113. (previously presented) The vehicle of Claim 61 wherein the vehicle is fabricated on an assembly line.

114.-125. (canceled)

126. (previously presented) A storage system for a vehicle having a cargo area and a pair of side panels disposed on either side of the cargo area, the storage system comprising at least one storage area located intermediate the side panels and extending into the cargo area of the vehicle, and comprising:

at least one opening effective to expose the interior of the storage area;

at least one section of at least one of the side panels being hinged, the hinged section effective to provide access to the storage area therein,

and wherein said storage system comprises at least one strut assembly operatively connected to retain the at least one hinged section of the side panel in an opened position and wherein the at least one strut assembly provides a temperature control during use, the control being insulation, heating, or heating and insulation.

127. (previously presented) A vehicle having a forward compartment for carrying a driver and an enclosure for passengers, merchandise or equipment wherein the enclosure is disposed to the rear of the driver compartment, and further wherein the enclosure is bounded by side panels and a rear wall, including at least one rear door, the vehicle comprising at least one storage area adjacent at least one side panel and extending into the enclosure of the vehicle, and wherein at least one side panel includes a hinged section effective to provide an opening from the exterior of the vehicle into the storage area and a mechanism for securing the at least one hinged section in the closed position,

wherein said vehicle includes at least one strut assembly operatively connected to retain the hinged section in an opened position and wherein the at least one strut assembly provides a temperature control during use, the control being insulation, heating, or heating and insulation.